
Four ways to draw closer to God and be in relationship with Jesus

“Oh God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you, in a dry and weary land where there is no water.” Psalm 63 v 1

We are not alone

Life with COVID for over two years has been hard for many. Our family has not been exempt from the hardship. It has felt like a dry season of sorts. You might relate to the constant unknown causing weariness and just feeling a bit lost in general. You might have realised that your relationships and faith have changed, and maybe it's not for the better. We have spoken with countless friends who have echoed these sentiments. But I would love to offer you some encouragement. If you have lost your way for a time, rest assured you aren't on your own. God hasn't left you. Jesus is still working in your life. If you are having problems with any relationship, as we know at the core of all things is our loving heavenly Father. We know that our Father cares deeply and intimately about all aspects of our life. As such, if we make sure our relationship with our Father is right, everything else will fall into place. As Matthew 6 verse 33 says it “Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and all these things will be added unto you.”

Maybe you have found yourself in a season of not opening your bible as regularly. As much as I will attest to opening my bible daily as a fundamental part of my Christian walk (and mental health), I want to encourage you to embrace some simplicity in the ways that you worship God. You don't need to read the entire bible in a year, but you do need to listen to God's words regularly. You don't need to practice an hour of meditation a day, but you do need to find stillness to know God (and see Him at work in your life). You don't need to sing hymns daily, but you do need to praise our Father regularly for all He is doing and has done in our lives. We don't need to be grateful for the hard situations we are going through, but we can be joyful in the hope we share. We don't need to spend 15 minutes praying every morning, but we do need to be faithful in prayer and be in constant communication with our loving heavenly father. Simply put, when I remove my long to do list of read, pray, meditate, and praise, I can just enjoy being in fellowship with Jesus and my Father so much more.

Back to basics

This COVID season has reminded me somewhat of when my kids were very young, and my husband was constantly travelling away from home. I had 2 under two, and life felt busy, unknown and empty at times. After a while, I realised that whilst raising two little people, I had lost myself. I was putting far too much pressure on myself to get things done and so after pouring out my heart to God one day, I went back to basics. God confirmed that despite me running out of time to do all the things, I was still worthy of His great love. He reminded me that despite my busy and unknown season, He was still right there. He assured me that despite my never ending to do list, I would always find peace at the feet of Jesus, and this provided great comfort. But still, to shift myself out of my dry season, I had to be intentional about spending time with God. Here's what I did to find myself back in the presence of our Father.

1) Word before world. I committed to a popular Christian sentiment of not being in the world (social media, TV, email, news etc) before I had spent time with my Father. I started waking up a little bit earlier than my children in order to spend a few minutes quietly thanking God for the day. I prayed from scripture as I wasn't entirely sure what to say at first. Psalm 63 verse 1 was a familiar prayer in those days.

2) **Be still and know God.** During the day, I aimed to find moments of stillness. I would often lay down beside a wall when the children were napping or enjoying screen time and place my feet at a 90-degree angle and thank God for His provisions. If I was struggling with patience and worried about my to do list, I practiced surrendering it to my Father and His son. More often than not, I got most of the things done, at least the important things, and that increased my faith as I realised that God makes us so uniquely and that He really does care about our prayers and the intimate details of our life.

3) **Get out in nature and admire God's creation and praise Him.** I don't know about you, but when I'm at the beach or walking in my local forest, I feel content. Something about my toes curling into the sand as the waves crash on the beach or listening to the birds calling in the trees as the wind rustles the leaves is just so soul satisfying. I like to picture what it would have been like to walk with God in the very beginning. As I walk, I talk with God about the things I am worried about. Amazingly, by the time I make it home, things don't seem so bad anymore.

4) **Embrace your season.** Whether you are in a season of unknown, or a season of hard, know that God is not going to leave you. In fact, we are told "The Lord himself goes before you and will be with you; He will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged." These words spoken by Moses to Joshua are still true for us today. Furthermore, we are told that "He who began a good work in you will carry it out to completion until the day of Jesus Christ." Philippians 1v 6. Take comfort in knowing that until Jesus returns, we are constantly being turned into Gods good work. Don't give up. It may feel hard, but we have this. You may feel like you can't go on in your season, but you can. This is just a season, and the Lord goes before you. We are told to simply surrender our burdens, and our Lord Jesus, who has been tempted in every way that we have, will carry us, and give us rest.

These four points were key to my surviving through the little years in staying close to God when it all felt hard and overwhelming. I have thought a lot about these points again in COVID as I have encouraged fellow brethren in their walk. I think that while we often desire to see steadfast and continual growth in our lives, God has other plans. He uses every season- from our high mountaintop experiences to our low spiritual valleys and struggles to accomplish the transformation that He desires. **As we walk through dry valleys, take heart in knowing that God goes before us, and we only need to cry out for help.** I hope these points help you in your kingdom walk.

Sending love, friends, from your sister in Christ.

Hannah

Hannah Shaw
